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ABSTRACT

The important role played by trustees of seminaries and the recruitment of these leaders are considered. The serious financial problems facing the board of directors has focused attention on the role and scope of seminary trusteeship. Leadership is needed by trustees to address issues of declining enrollments, curricula that address theological issues of the contemporary world, and the changing needs of the church and its ministry. Trusteeship is an invitation to service and ministry in the church. The search for trustees must begin by revitalizing the nominating committee. The first step is to review the current board to determine its makeup, strengths, and weaknesses. Three essentials of the search and nomination process are: a pool of potential nominees from which the board can choose; a way to evaluate the current board and making long-range plans for board development according to an established ideal profile; and making the nominee aware of the seminary's expectations. A sample board profile is presented, that includes categories such as age, sex, race, areas of expertise, and geographical distribution. The specific circumstances that arise when board members are appointed by outside bodies are also addressed, along with future challenges for seminaries. (SW)

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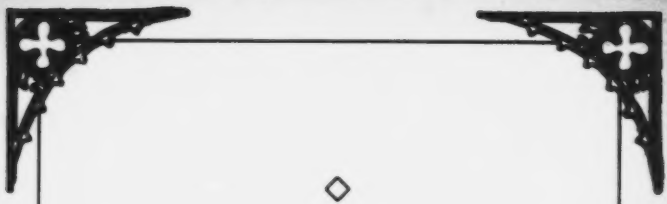

Recruiting Seminary Trustees

by Malcolm Warford

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Association of Governing Boards

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Foreword

Recruiting Seminary Trustees is the second in a series of three monographs intended for trustees and chief executives of theological schools. The other titles in this series are *The Selection of Seminary Presidents* and *Strategic Planning for Seminaries.*

These monographs are designed to supplement readings in *The Good Steward: A Guide to Theological School Trusteeship,* a volume published in 1983 that has received phenomenal acceptance among theological school trustees and presidents. Both *The Good Steward* and this follow-up series are sponsored by The Lilly Endowment, Inc., to strengthen the development of trusteeship in theological education.

AGB's Theological School Trustee Leadership Program, begun in 1981 with the first of two grants from The Lilly Endowment, Inc., was established to help define performance standards for theological governing boards by developing self-study guidelines and illustrative bylaws. In addition, AGB created a Board-Mentor Service that provides opportunities for board self-assessment retreats for trustees and chief executives through the help of trustee-mentors professionally trained in theological governance.

The enthusiastic response to the entire program underscores the growing sense of importance placed on trustee development within theological education.

The intent of this new series is to provide informed perspectives from individuals who are knowledgeable about trusteeship and institutional governance. Their views are their own, however, and should not be construed to be official positions, policies, or prescriptions of the Association of Governing Boards or The Lilly Endowment, Inc.

Finally, we at AGB extend a special thanks to Robert Wood Lynn and Fred L. Hofheinz of The Lilly Endowment, Inc., whose shared

conviction about the importance of trusteeship to the future of theological education made this program and these publications possible.

Richard T. Ingram
Director, Theological School
Trustee Leadership Program

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The future of theological education depends to a great extent upon the ability of seminaries to select and recruit trustees who will exercise leadership in the days ahead. While the issue of trusteeship has been a major concern of higher education in the past decade, it is only recently that theological education has recognized the crucial role that boards play in establishing and sustaining the purposes of seminaries.

The Nature of Theological Trusteeship

For too many years trusteeship has been perceived as an itinerate commitment, one that required little except occasional attendance at meetings and marginal participation in the life of a school. This passive form of trusteeship is no longer adequate to confront the significant issues in theological education: The most obvious of these immediate issues is the financial crisis characterizing so many of the schools that are affiliated with the Association of Theological Schools.

Denominational financial support of theological education—traditionally the primary source of income for seminaries—continues to erode as funds are reduced in actual as well as real dollars. More and more schools, regardless of their denominational ties, have to exist as freestanding institutions accountable for their own fiscal integrity, establishing an immediate and often urgent agenda for boards of directors who must deal with the crisis of accumulating deficits. The recognition that a seminary's board of directors has to address this crisis has focused attention on the role and scope of seminary trusteeship; it has become the occasion for deeper reflection on the nature of theological education itself.

The challenges of economic uncertainty are matched by the uncertainties of a chang-

ing student population, the search for new curricula to address the theological issues of the contemporary world, and the changing needs of the church and its ministry. These issues constitute a significant task for theological schools, a task that cannot be accomplished unless trustees provide leadership in the life of the entire seminary community.

Perhaps no one has written more incisively on the nature of theological trusteeship than Robert K. Greenleaf, who reminds us that trustee leadership calls a board to an imaginative and prophetic task that places mission rather than maintenance at the center of its agenda. In this regard, the theological trustee is first of all one who compels an institution to ask questions about its mission and its service to church and society. In particular, Greenleaf suggests that trustees have been given the chance to lead a seminary to:

1) evolve an adequate theology of institutions for these times,

2) define in contemporary terms whom and what purpose the seminary can best serve,

3) find the best curriculum and method to serve those people and that purpose,

4) give effective support to churches in the full scope of their mission, and

5) become a significant source of prophetic vision, so that seminaries are places that are looked to for guidance and light.[1]

This renewed understanding of seminary trusteeship requires the selection and recruitment of persons who accept trusteeship as a calling. This selection and recruitment process begins with the acknowledgement that in electing women and men trustees of theological schools, we are inviting them to accept a ministry in the church. In this sense, trusteeship is not a token or honorary office but an invitation to service which is at the heart of any Christian ministry in society.

Trusteeship defined as leadership, as ministry, and as service requires women and men who will accept this responsibility as a primary one in their lives. However, when one defines seminary trusteeship as service, the selection and recruitment process must differ from that process employed for trustees who are elected for status or honor. In searching for persons to be trustees of theological seminaries, we are seeking individuals with the capacity to care for the life of the school and who see the seminary in its wider responsibility to the mission of the church. The seminary trustee is not called simply to help a theological school survive; the trustee is called to help that seminary imagine what it *should* be in the light of God's promises.

Renewal of the Board

A board that intends to renew its life and to search for persons who will join in this renewal must begin by revitalizing the Nominating Committee. While the leadership of the chairperson and the seminary president is crucial in providing direction for selecting and recruiting board members, the only sure way of developing a sustained commitment to this task is by strengthening the Nominating Committee, whose major purpose is the ongoing search for and review of persons who will serve on the board.

Board renewal does not take place in a few years. It is a long-term commitment that must be nurtured continually and patiently. The journey, however, has to begin with a first step: a review of the current board to ascertain its makeup, strengths, and weaknesses. This involves (1) getting a picture of trustee's diversity of age, sex, ethnic background and geographic roots, and (2) looking closely at the areas of expertise and personal histories that the board members brought with them to the seminary.

More often than not, trustees have been added to a seminary board without much thought about the way a single appointment fits into the overall needs of the board. Only when a Nominating Committee develops a long-term perspective can a board ensure that its members represent the various publics of the school and the different areas of experience and competency needed by the board to function at its best. This sometimes is a difficult task for trustees who avoid the tough question of how board composition corresponds with the institution's needs. In fact, a careful process of selecting and recruiting trustees will usually raise the larger issue of whether or not the board itself is clear about its purpose and mission.

A Nominating Committee should be explicit in how it will go about searching for, considering, and nominating people for the board. In particular, there are three essential components of these procedures:

1. Trustee selection depends first of all upon the establishment of a pool of potential nominees from which the board can choose those to consider for appointment. This necessitates a long list of individuals whose names have been suggested by board members, faculty, students, alumni, and other friends of the seminary. This list is the beginning point for the development of information identifying each nominee and providing at least some basic data about them, i.e. family background, education, occupation, interests, relationship with the seminary, commitment to the church, and responsibilities to other institutions.

It might take as long as three to five years before committee members are satisfied that they know enough about an individual and believe the nominee knows enough about the seminary to consider approaching that person for service on the board. In this regard, it is crucial that the president participate actively in the Nominating Committee's

work because it is the president, along with other committee members, who will be most responsible for researching and making contacts with those persons being considered. No move should be made beyond this review stage until the president and at least one member of the Nominating Committee have met and become acquainted with the individual under consideration.

If the nominee has not had any contact with the seminary, the committee should make sure that the individual is introduced to the institution and is given an opportunity to become acquainted with its various activities. Indeed, one could at this point invite that person to serve *ex gratia* on a board committee. This kind of committee service gives the individual and the board a chance to get to know each other.

2. The consideration of a nominee must take place within the larger question of how the individual matches the needs of the board established by the Nominating Committee. This presupposes the establishment of an ideal composition that takes into consideration all the various factors that the Nominating Committee thinks should be represented on the board.

The Sample Board Profile established by the Association of Governing Boards (which I have modified for theological schools) is a good place to begin. The form provides a means for evaluating the current board and making long-range plans for board development according to an established ideal profile.

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Categories	Present Membership	Anticipated Appointments Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Age				
70 and over				
60–69				
50–59				
40–49				
30–39				
Under 30				
Sex				
Female				
Male				
Race				
White				
Black				
Hispanic				
Asian or Pacific Island				
Native American or Alaskan Native				
Area of Expertise				
Administration				
Business				
Community Volunteer				
Education				
Farming				
Finance				
Fund Raising				
Legal				
Marketing				
Physical Plant				
Public Policy				
Public Relations				
Church				
Other				

Categories	Present Membership	Anticipated Appointments Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Geographical Distribution				
Local				
From Adjacent Area				
Key City(ies)				
Out-of-State				
Seminary Relationship				
Alumni/ae				
Current Donor				
Other				
Financial Position				
Independent				
Salaried				
Other				
Denominational Affiliation				
Length of Board Service				
More than 10 years				
5–10 years				
2–4 years				
one year or less				
Summary				
Clergy				
Local Congregation				
Regional or National Agency				
Professional				
Law				
Education				
Other				
Volunteer				
Business				

As you can see from the AGB form, it is essential that the committee chart the way in which it will weigh various characteristics and then establish the ideal board composition on the basis of those judgments. While a board may never fulfill exactly the ideal composition that it has established, without these explicit criteria the Nominating Committee will tend to get lost in the random consideration of individuals and will forfeit the larger sense of what the board needs to fulfill its mission.

When considering individuals and their relationships with the various characteristics in the ideal Board Profile, it becomes clear that any one nominee needs to embody several criteria. The mistake made quite often in board development is the reduction of multiple criteria to a single criterion for selection, so that the nominee in effect becomes the representative of a single constituency and its interests. In this context, the board tends to become an assembly of constituency representatives rather than a community of women and men from diverse backgrounds who together embody primary commitments to the school's mission.

At various times, the board will shift its composition to meet specific needs. But the Nominating Committee must guide the nomination process in such a way that long-term needs are retained within the short-term pressure to elect trustees who can help with immediate issues.

3. In approaching an individual for nomination, the Nominating Committee member and the president should be explicit about the seminary's expectations for that person's board service. It is important that the individual be aware of what it is he or she in particular is perceived to offer to the board. The person also should know what the institution's needs are, the issues it faces, and the way in which he or she will be expected to participate on the board.

Some boards have found it helpful to develop their own "Statement of Trustee Responsibilities" to assist with trustee recruitment. The process of writing and adopting such a statement of two or three pages is itself a useful process for the board; a process that should begin with the Nominating Committee and the chief executive. Clarifying mutual expectations on matters ranging from consistent attendance and participation in board/committee meetings to assistance with fund raising, including annual giving according to one's means, benefits everyone.

Before the actual nomination is made to the entire board, it is advisable that some informal consultation take place with selected trustees about the person under consideration. It is unrealistic to assume that reservations about a person will be expressed in the more-or-less public setting of the board meeting.

Thus, the actual nomination of an individual to the board should come after cultivation and relationship; it should be the outcome of a very careful process of research, contact, and nurture.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the husband or wife of a prospective trustee needs to be involved in the life of the school as well. Some appropriate way should be found for spouses to participate, to become acquainted with students, faculty, and staff. If trusteeship is to be a primary commitment, then the persons closest to the trustee need to be aware of the life and mission of the school to which energy, time, and money will be committed.

When Board Members Are Appointed By Outside Bodies

Governing boards whose members are appointed by outside bodies represent a particular set of circumstances that require careful consideration. In some the-

ological seminaries, the board is appointed by other constituent bodies, i.e., elected by a church convention. The problem with outside appointment of board members is, of course, that those members may see their primary task as representing the interests of an external constituency rather than the responsibility of caring for the life of the school. Many seminaries simply accept this situation and see no other alternative than to receive appointments made in their behalf. This is not, however, the only option available.

Theological schools can consider imaginatively the ways in which they may help outside constituent bodies to make board appointments. For example, it may be possible for the president and Nominating Committee to meet with the officials and agencies of the denomination or judicatory to help them understand the institution's needs. The outside organizations should be informed about the needs of the seminary and the ways in which appointees to the board have the capacity to provide the greatest possible service to the school. This does not mean that the seminary may assume it has the right to tell the outside bodies exactly what individual should be appointed, but it is important that a seminary board find a way to describe its needs so that some guidelines are established within which those appointments are made.

In Roman Catholic schools where ownership and legal authority for the school rest in a religious order or with the bishop, the seminary board may be somewhat advisory. In this case, it is essential that the relationship between the responsibilities of the board of directors and the effective authority of the bishop or the religious order be dealt with directly.

One of the issues very much alive in Catholic theological education is the advisability of actual as well as advisory power being centered in boards composed of self-sustain-

ing members. The Reverend Paul Reinert, S.J., the chancellor of St. Louis University and a longtime leader in higher education, often has stressed the importance of granting full authority to the boards of Catholic institutions. Father Reinert has pointed out that on this particular issue a crucial difference between higher education and theological education is that seminaries are responsible for the formation and preparation of students for the priesthood. This difference makes the matter of board authority somewhat more problematic than in a situation where ordination is not at stake. Within this context, it is a difficult question whether laity in the Roman Catholic Church can exercise the same kind of authority that is assumed in a Protestant school where the polity is quite different. Thus, while Catholic colleges and universities might have increasingly (though not completely) moved toward the creation of independent and self-sustaining governing boards, it is unlikely that this will occur in Catholic seminaries.[2]

The decision of a bishop or religious order to retain ultimate authority does not mean that a board composed of clergy and laity may not exercise significant, if not primary, responsibility for the life of the seminary. Some seminaries have developed structures that permit the bishop or religious order to maintain final authority, but assign the continuous overseeing of the school to a board of directors.

The designation of authority requires explicit delineation of roles and responsibilities to maintain the integrity of theological trusteeship. Otherwise, there almost always develops a two-tiered system that usually ends in confusion and conflict. It does not take long for a trustee to figure out that he or she has been elected to a board simply because of the hope that the trustee will be a source of financial support, but not a real partner in the leadership of the institution. The furtive search for fiscal sta-

bility will not result necessarily in the creation of a stronger and more diversified board. Instead, the election of an expanded board must flow from a larger and more sustained commitment to the development of seminary trusteeship.

Choosing the Future

We are heirs of past generations that established the institutions we serve. In recent decades, we have so taken for granted the continuing stability of theological seminaries that we often have reaped what others have sown. The current situation in theological education forces us not only to live with leanness, but to live imaginatively as well. We are called to a renewed sense of trusteeship that knows the fragile state of things, yet realizes we now must establish the foundation for future generations; we must choose our future and not stumble upon it.

We cannot view the future simply as a continuation of the present or some glorious moment of the past. Instead, we must provide for the faithful, creative, and prophetic development of theological education. We cannot do this if we see ourselves as the last generation and perceive trusteeship as a holding action that conserves the resources of the past in ever more dwindling amounts. A different possibility is to view trusteeship as the imagining of questions not yet posed and the establishing of trusts for generations to come. In this regard, a story told by Gregory Bateson is appropriate:[3]

In speaking of the responsibilities of one generation for generations to come, Bateson related how the old oak beams in the dining hall of New College, Oxford (England), were found to be infested with deathwatch beetles and had to be replaced.

In deciding how the beams would be replaced, a junior fellow of the college sug-

gested what seemed at the time to be an outlandish possibility: some of the college lands might contain oak trees that could provide new beams. When the college forester was asked if there were any oaks that could be used, he replied, "Well, sir, we was wonderin' when you'd be askin'."

As it turned out, at the founding of New College (1379), a grove of oak trees had been planted to replace the beams in the event they became infested with beetles. The college's founders made this provision because in their experience oak beams invariably did become infested. The legacy had been handed down from one century to another and from one forester's care to the next. As Bateson remarked, "A nice story. That's the way to run a culture."

Bateson's story of the oak beams for New College is indeed a nice story and a fitting conclusion to this essay on trusteeship. It reminds us that institutions are fragile creations that require continuing care, imagination, and long-range support. We need trustees who see their office as that of leadership and service, not for the purpose of preserving an institution, but for the larger mission of the seminary's service to the church and the world. We need trustees who know the history and culture of the school, but who are committed to its future as well as its present and past. For boards to be made up of trustees with such vision, we must establish careful and sustained means of selecting and recruiting women and men for this high calling.

Footnotes

1. Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Seminary As An Institution: The Work of the Trustee* (Indianapolis: The Lilly Endowment, Inc., 1980), 11–12.

2. Conversation with The Reverend Paul Reinert, S.J.

3. Gregory Bateson, "The Oak Beams of New College," in *The Next Whole Earth Catalog*, ed. Stewart Brand (New York: Random House, 1980), 77.

For Further Reading

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